



Narrative Point of View: The Rhetoric of "Au Hasard, Balthazar"

Nick Browne

Film Quarterly, Vol. 31, No. 1. (Autumn, 1977), pp. 19-31.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28197723%2931%3A1%3C19%3ANPOVTR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>

Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Narrative Point of View: The Rhetoric of Au Hasard, Balthazar

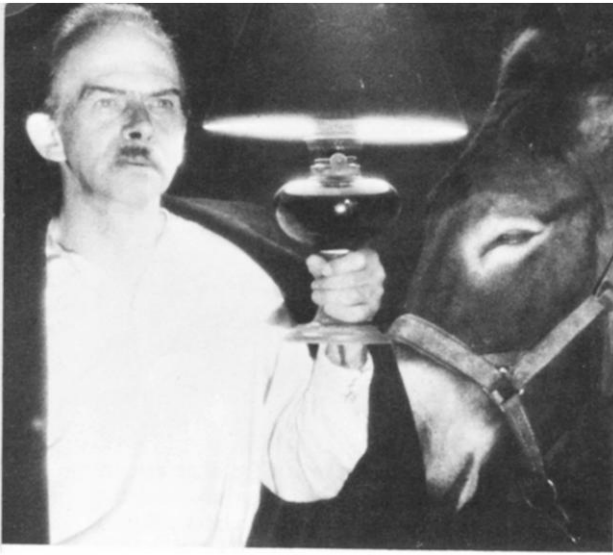
The study of the structure of filmic narration, the act of showing events to a spectator, is different from the study of the narrative itself. In particular, an explanation of narration and of the organization of narrative space calls for a study of how the text mediates the functions of narrator, character, and spectator. A previous analysis of the "position of the spectator" in a narrative film ("The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*," *Film Quarterly*, Winter 1975–76) sought (1) to account for the construction and significance of narrative space by the mutually implicating "positions" of camera, character, spectator, and (2) by critiquing the terms of received opinion on this matter, to open up the possibilities of a more satisfying account of the structure of filmic narration based on a rhetorical model. It is within the terms of this model that the present essay addresses the function of the narrator within the overall design of a film: it continues, on the basis of a different kind of film, the study of the relation between narration and the spectator's "reading." It will thus be useful to review, in terms of the present requirements, the principal issues raised by a currently influential account of the position of the spectator.

The Oudart/Dayan/Henderson analysis (*Film Quarterly*, Fall 1974) has a specific advantage over the traditional one. Instead of accounting for camera position by reference to the "ideal spectator's" natural movement of attention to the dramatically significant action (an account that defines the role of the camera in filmic representation entirely on the model of the spectator of drama, leaving no scope for the filmic properties of narration at all), it invokes a mechanism in which what the spectator sees is mediated by the

view of an off-screen character. The shot/reverse shot "system of the suture" is then taken as the privileged paradigm for the construction of narrative space, as in Stephen Heath's "Narrative Space" (*Screen*, Autumn 1976).^{*} But an explanation or a theory whose principal logic is ascription—referring an account of a shot to the authority, to the glance of a depicted character—can neither explain third-person shots adequately, nor assimilate them to first-person shots, nor provide a basis for a coherent account of the logic of shots of either kind. The "system of the suture" is an account of reading and not of production. Shot/reverse shot or "point of view shot" are narrative devices employed by a narrator in which the character acts as a delegate. What is at stake, in theoretical terms, is an account of the authority for and significance of the shot/reverse shot and not just what the shot designates or indirectly refers to. Thus William Rothman's "Against the System of the Suture" (*Film Quarterly*, Fall 1975) argues for the relevance of particular acts of criticism in the determination of its meaning.

What is at issue is the function and power of the subject who "enunciates" the narration: the one who presents the discourse. Though the system of the suture invokes a subject of *énonciation*, the off-screen character, it is only an apparent one, and exists on the same narrative level as the depicted character, that of the fiction (*énoncé*). Thus the system does not offer adequate terms—ones that comprehend the level of the narration proper (*énonciation*)—to account for the production of the character whose glance subtends the space.

^{*}For a different approach to the shot/reverse shot figure, see Barry Salt's article elsewhere in this issue.—ED.



Balthazar the "saint"

Finally, as to the contention that the spectator's position is dictated in its major effects by an identification with the camera: the *Stagecoach* analysis shows that the spectator's emotional and fictional "positions" do not necessarily coincide with this literal optical one even when the camera occupies the geographical place of a character who is used as the central point of reference for the depiction of space. On the contrary, the film draws on the difference between literal and figurative viewpoints in order to achieve its effect on the spectator. Though Lucy, as beholder or as visual presence, is the central support for the camera's representation of the scene, she is being criticized by the film. The spectator's "position" in other words, so far as his commitments are concerned, is identified neither with the vantage point of the camera, nor with the point of view of the central character. She is inscribed in a larger meaningful structure—whose precise formal coordinates are indistinct—that has the power to assess and to place those characters who seem to authorize the shots that "belong" to them. The articulation of critical judgment, by the control of narrative point of view, marks the intervention of the power specific to the narrator.

The narrator exhibits the images of the film and by control of camera position, *mise-en-scène*, editing, and sound, positions the spectator in a certain relation to the depicted world. He creates a fictional position we have called the "spectator-

BALTHAZAR

in-the-text." He constructs too, through the use of the character as a medium of communication, views on the world of the story. While the characters' views have their own integrity, it is the place of the narrator to exhibit them as views, and to make us see them as part of a larger picture through the power of his commentary. That is, the narrator is related to characters by both structures of analogy (he can appropriate their gaze) and independence (he can show their views as simply views). This is the basis of the distinction between the two orders of significant structure: *representation* (the set of rhetorical mechanisms through which the narrator presents the story to the spectator); and *story* (the actions, speech, and perceptions of the character, whose glance is like other actions: an "object" to be depicted).

Narration as a communicational act is a process of interpreting the significance of a character's experience through exhibiting it cinematically for the spectator. As such it is part of narrative theory to examine and explain the linkages between different orders of seeing integrated within a film: "shot," "point of view shot," "character's point of view," and "narrative point of view." The narrative exhibits the action and produces an interpretation of it by coordinating these various levels of seeing: he makes and discloses "narrative point of view" by positioning the "spectator-in-the-text."

An explanation of the production and significance of narrative space cannot be limited to that tendered by any "ideal spectator," or of the structuring function of a character's glance or "point of view." What is necessary for an account of the production of fictional space and the inscription of the spectator in it is the same as for an account of the structure of narration: a model of the productive mediations among narrator/character/spectator. Whether or not it is necessary to assume that the investment of authority in the camera's framing represents a conventionally analyzable human act, narrative agency is a function necessary for an analysis of the production of textual effects.

This essay on Bresson's *Au Hasard, Balthazar* is part of a continuing study of the relation between the narrator's act of relating the characters' story and the spectator's act of reading it. This particular film is of special interest to the study of nar-

ration and of point of view (both character's and narrator's) because its central and unifying figure is nonhuman: the donkey Balthazar. The choice of Balthazar as the subject of the story (it is framed by his birth and death) creates effects integral to the significance of the work but imposes on the narration certain special problems. In a conventional narrative, for example, a central character whose "consciousness" is constructed and appropriated by the film generally functions to mediate the world of the film to the spectator. Thus the cuts within a point-of-view sequence are formal markers of the significant action of this character, the direction of his or her attention. A conventional rhetoric allows the spectator to infer characters' "views" from shots. Filmic narration works so that this kind of inference constructs "character." In *Au Hasard, Balthazar*, however, the central depicted consciousness is not human, nor is it anthropomorphized exactly, and it does not function as transparent medium. Likewise, the human characters in the film, whose fortunes are paralleled with Balthazar, are opaque. What follows, then, is a study of the aims and strategies of narration in a text whose rhetorical form is articulated on special premises.

The essay examines in detail the special strategies of narration adopted by the film. It has two related parts: (1) an analysis of the assumptions and effects of the formal rhetoric of shot/reverse shot through an analysis of a sequence, and (2) a demonstration of the way this rhetoric is made to serve allegorical purposes in accord with the total design of the work.

Au Hasard, Balthazar makes implicit use of medieval allegory for the exposition of the story and the announcement of its doctrine. But at the same time it renders ineffectual what is usually an attending result of that traditional form: the audience's identification with the character or with the work as an illustration, example, or object of imitation. The film does not attempt to morally instruct the audience: the life of this figure is not held up for imitation. Rather the film seeks to inhibit, or at least to condition, the pity or identification that in Christian aesthetics is normally associated with moral example. We see Balthazar and the character with which he is explicitly com-

pared suffer, but the film locates the cause of this suffering beyond the categories of everyday psychological or moral experience. In a world in which the forces of cruelty and domination are inevitably joined in violent and merciless combat with good, the grounds for responses like pity or moral condemnation are shown to be problematical. The retardation of our tendency to identify, accomplished by a coherent set of strategies for depicting character, is in the service of another end. These events are meant to be contemplated as a religious image of man's unredeemed suffering. The film in its most general significance undertakes to testify to a religious truth: there is a divinity behind the chance events of life and the suffering of man.

The problem of the construction of the film is to authenticate this claim. The film chooses to found its claim to authenticity and belief on the spectator's experience of the story. Though its basic mode is allegory, the film makes no appeal to ecclesiastical authority. It does not want to lose its claim to truth-to-life by being too explicitly an illustration or demonstration of an abstract or bookish system. The film makes its appeal to truth neither by asking to be considered in a religious tradition nor by attempting to certify an historical event. Rather, it undertakes to validate its religious claims by the spectator's apprehension of the truthfulness of its fictional world—specifically through the "impression of reality," produced by the three-dimensional space of action in real locales, and through the evident corporality of its living beings. The film attempts, in other words, to establish a religious truth incarnated in the events of its story—events which appear disordered by chance and irrational in their secular injustice.

To fulfill the requirement of establishing a credible but religiously significant world, the narration of the film must establish, order, and convey to the spectator the relationships between the literal and figurative meanings of the depicted events. As a basic strategy, the film undertakes to show the difference between the meaning of Balthazar for the characters in the story and for ourselves. The effect of the film's blocking our tendency to identify with the suffering figures of the story is transformed, by the mediating features of the representation, into an experience that restores to those figures a depth of interiority, of spirituality,



1a



1b



2



3a



3b



4



5



6



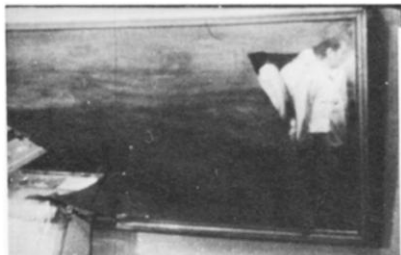
7a



7b



8a



8b



9a



9b



10



11

amounting to a theological and ecstatic mystery. Through an ensemble of means that tie the *story* to the *representation*, the literal level supports and announces a second, figurative, and implied meaning that has transforming significance. By taking in charge the special conditions of the spectator's position, his status as a witness, the film gives a second meaning to the spectacle of passion, love, humiliation, and cruelty. Through the experience of the spectator, the allegory testifies to what Bresson set out from the first to demonstrate: the full and irreducible mystery of Balthazar's story, and the unseen and mysterious power beyond naming that stands behind man's suffering in the world.

The confrontation between Arnold, the paradigmatic Bressonian victim, and his antagonist Gerard in the café sets out the problem of the rhetorical use of shot/reverse shot in the film. In this scene, a celebration party for Arnold who has inherited some money, Gerard accosts Arnold, calls him an idiot, tells him to drink, and then smashes things up. Arnold pays. In an intercut action, Marie breaks with her mother after telling her she loves Gerard, but is immediately rejected by him. Gerard puts Arnold on the donkey who has been standing nearby, and sends him out on the road where he dies.

The action is developed by four pairs of shot/reverse shots in which both characters occupy the frame, one nearly frontal, the other from the back. The angle on Gerard is symmetrical to the angle on Arnold, constituting a framing inconsistent with Gerard's physical domination that amounts to assault. Arnold passively accepts Gerard's insults and obeys his orders. Each looks at the other in a way that shows at the same time who he is to himself and to the other. After Arnold gives back a blank, unresponsive stare as an answer to the or-

der to drink, Gerard, in a shot designed to emphasize the movement of his hand (7a, b), reaches for the bottle. The film thus links Arnold's gaze with the destruction of the mirror. For Gerard, Arnold's blank stare is emblematic of the presence (concentrated in his gaze) that, like a literal mirror, presents to his conscience an intolerable image. What Gerard sees in Arnold at this moment, what so calls for his destruction (or its displacement: the breaking up of the café) is the reproach that evil apprehends in its self-regard. What Gerard wishes to destroy is Arnold's inescapable, unblinking gaze. And Arnold unblinkingly recognizes in Gerard something equally profound: his torment from the beginning of time, his fate against which appeal is pointless, his nothingness, his death.

Framing here is not motivated by, nor does it signify, a psychology of power, but, by its symmetry, establishes and defines the nature of their interlocked destinies. From the set-up behind Arnold's back we are aware, particularly because this sequence has such precise formal symmetries, of Arnold's height, or rather his being "above." Paradoxically, this position of elevation seems to make him vulnerable to Gerard and also somehow puts him outside the perception of the crowd. From Balthazar's descent as a foal high in the mountains, to his ascent and death amidst the sheep at the end, the vertical dimension of space corresponds to the mysterious symbolism of election. Arnold's height and stillness are contrasted to the movement of those around him.

Arnold knows that the evil Gerard inevitably accomplishes his ends, by whatever means are necessary. In this sense the terms of the drama of confrontation imply a theological schema whose coordinates are activity and passivity. Gerard approaches Arnold, throws the bottle, initiates the destruction of the café. Camera movement and framing are motivated by the movement of his hands and feet. Arnold, by contrast, is unresponsive and still. Throughout the scene his face shows the same resigned, nearly blank expression—a sign of his unchanging condition. Bresson expressly cuts from Gerard to Arnold to show us the absence of any change. Thus the set-up from behind Arnold's back is as expressive as his front of his vulnerable position in the world. This passivity is

summarized in the (non) "reaction-shot" (10) to the crashing of the broken glass: he sits staring blankly, his hands folded inward on his knees, jostled slightly by the dancers. All around him people are dancing to the music but he is at the center, still. He is located in a middle spatial zone of a shot with a full scenic depth and set off from the "bopping," angular movements in both the foreground and background. The foreground as a plane of significant action is restricted to setting off and unveiling the principal action. Typically the foreground first screens and then discloses the significant action as with Gerard's approach in (1a, b). Because we know nothing of his inner state, Arnold is not revealed, as the external action is, by the structures that display him to our view. It is this constant condition of his being that accounts for the expressiveness of his stillness, his impassive eye, his physiognomy. By contrast, Gerard's actions do disclose him, show what he is as a character: the camera is motivated by his action and serves to characterize it.

What is so horrifying about the destruction in this scene is not just its violence or its calculation, but that it continues unopposed. Our sympathies in the matter—our position as a spectator—is complex. From the beginning we understand that Arnold will pay. The crashing of glass, though, like the music played on the jukebox, is a matter of complete indifference to him. While Gerard methodically destroys the café, the crowd dances obliviously, and Arnold gazes blankly at the floor. The music plays on, mechanically acting as a double counterpoint to the periodic crashing of glass and to Arnold's quiet stillness amidst the flurry of movement. The music's buoyant rhythm contradicts the sense of the action, and underlines the absence of a single unified emotional tone in the scene. The spectator is horrified at the violence, but it is a reaction that is compromised by not being shared by anyone in the story. When looking to Arnold, or to anyone, for a response that would locate us within the scene, or confirm our sense of it, we are thrown back on ourselves.

The disjunction of music and action denies the possibility of any simple identification based on emotional analogy between spectator and character. Arnold's situation as the good but helpless character calls forth a feeling; Bresson can count

on that; but by Arnold's lack of response, we are denied the grounds for perceiving a relevant common trait. We recognize in such a moment the difference between the character and ourselves. In this sense Arnold is a model of the spectator's relation to Balthazar. Though the acting style precludes expressive exteriorization, the characters have feeling. But as spectators we have no immediate access through the image or resources of the style to a knowledge of those feelings that might ordinarily account for his actions. The film's calling for and then denying our impulse to feel *with* the character is precisely its way of depicting character. This strategy, when linked with the lack of any response by the group, puts in question the operation of a conventional moral structure within the world of the story. The effect in turn is to dislocate us from our usual moral wishes and expectations.

This conception of action is linked to a filmic rhetoric that mediates our knowledge of the character. Even in the shot/reverse shot figure, as in the confrontation between Arnold and Gerard, the film delineates the difference between what a character is shown to see and what we as the film's spectators see. The effect of the presence of the characters in the frame together in the overall conception of the action is to distinguish our location (where the camera is) from the description, in spatial terms, of the character's subjectivity. The sense of depicted space created by the film's succession of images, is read not as the product of a character's glance, nor as the depiction or effect of his consciousness, but more as registering the impersonality of a narrative syntax. The spectator's sense of the impersonality of the framing (introduced by the dissociation of the spatial location of the camera from inferences about the psychology of character) is integral to our reading of Bresson's problematic of character. The framing is a triumph of formality different from the sense of the intensity of the written text of the dialogue. In its rigor and asceticism, and in its flattening of feeling, the framing corresponds to the intonation of the performance of the dialogue. The framing has the effect of a negation, and what it denies is that an angle of vision can represent what a face or voice cannot.

While relying on the assumption of formal iden-

tification between the place of character and that of the spectator called for in a conventional film, the Bressonian strategy of dissociation at the same time negates it and reconstructs the process of "reading" for its own ends. By making the spectator continuously alert to this dissociation—narrator/character/spectator—the film restricts the scope and role of participation in the reading process, and defines the place of the spectator—as a being outside the action, before the screen, and conscious of that status. Though the film's rhetoric debars the spectator from identification, it rivets his attention by the very authority of its precision. Bresson proposes a rhetoric not of *identification* with character but of *attention* to the image. The spectator's interest, however, does not attach to the structures of the representation as such. His interest is directed toward the characters and to the story that unfolds in a depicted three-dimensional space. Though inviting speculation on reflexivity, Gerard's breaking the mirror should not be read as an allegory of a "deconstruction" of a form of cinema: its meaning in the first instance relates to the description of character. But because of the formality of the *representation* (its symmetries, interruption of expected forms of continuity, structures of dissociation) the image acquires a presence not fully located within, or explained by, the terms of the *story*. Yet the film does not deprive these images of an actual meaningful reference. In fact the film hyperbolically asserts the importance of that reference through the emphatic presence of "effects" on the sound track. We see the film at the same time and in equal measure as story and as a succession of concrete images. The "impression of reality" made by the film is jointly the reality of the discourse and the reality of the depicted world.

The spectator is thus continually reminded that he is not meant to imagine that the character produces the shot or that either character or spectator has such power. The subject of *énonciation* in this form of rhetoric is not integrated into the *story*. The simple fact that both Arnold and Gerard are together in the frame in the shot/reverse shot does not in itself reconstruct the "system of the suture." But its linkage with the psychological premises of the action (namely the inaccessible interiority of the character, the opaqueness) has

the effect of restricting the capacity of the spectator's perception of an emotional analogy that would in turn support a series of formal identifications: shot/character's point of view/spectator's point of view. The spectator senses rather the dissociation and is thus in a position to see the images as independent to some degree from the demands of the story. The rhetoric thus encourages the question who is showing these images and for whom, and as such works to expose the conditions and limits of the narrator's power. It acknowledges an account of the production: it is one outside the fiction, and not just off-screen, who organizes it. Thus the film's rhetoric brings the procedures of reading into accord with the marks of the narrator's production.

The premises of characterization and of the *découpage* are coordinate: both create a picture of a mysterious life, the understanding of whose interiority is altogether problematic. This effort to preserve the mysteriousness of person is one aspect of the justification of a rhetorical style that denies the possibility of an identification between character and spectator. It will take an analysis of the allegory to show how this psychological position is transformed into a condition of perceiving the religious image that Bresson proposes.

The allegorical structure and significance of the film is based on Balthazar's life. That life means what it does, though, only by reference to a human world, specifically the world of Marie and her family, lover, suitor, and the inhabitants of her village (baker, grain merchant, etc.). Balthazar is the thread the film follows, situating Marie's fortunes against the background of her father's legal dispute and an obscure smuggling plot involving Arnold and Gerard. Each episode in Balthazar's life is treated as the occasion for defining a kind of eventfulness the film calls "chance," and for delineating a certain stage or condition of life.

The film does not restrict its representation of the meaning of Balthazar's life to the simple recital of events. The film's narration constitutes an interpretation of the *story* by means of two architectonic strategies: allegory and personification. The design of this figurative commentary on the story has an intricate textual logic. The allegory denies that the meaning(s) of Balthazar are

defined exclusively by the characters' literal understanding of him. The narration shows that Balthazar is an opaque figure incomprehensible to human thought. By simultaneously exhibiting, and blocking, his literal meaning within the story, and inhibiting our tendency to personification, the allegorical structure proposes a figurative level of meaning, which leads us to see Balthazar as a religious emblem whose life announces a Christian truth, the need for God's mercy.

The film continuously explores Balthazar's ambiguous existence as subject and object. The complex intimacy of his connection with the lives of characters affirms both. As Bresson makes clear, in the everyday world he is treated as an animal. By a fastidious attention to the general economy of exchange (usually the passing of money and goods from one hand to another), Balthazar is depicted as a piece of property and a beast of burden. He can be used for the satisfaction of debts and bequeathed by wills; he pulls hay, draws a cart, delivers bread. At the same time, he is named and treated by people in ways that seem appropriate, and then only rarely, to human life: he is called a "genius" (circusman), a "saint" (Marie's mother), "son of the Devil" (Arnold). He is loved and abandoned by Marie; hated, burned, beaten by Gerard; beaten and saved from the executioner's ax by Arnold. At the limit of this characterization is his part in Christian ritual. At the beginning of the film he is baptized and given the salt of wisdom. Toward the end, he leads the funeral cortege of Marie's father, dressed in ecclesiastical vestments.

Balthazar functions as the locus of successive emotional displacements and projections by others. His very nature in the film is to sustain—neither to confirm nor to deny—the validity of the way others regard him. He is almost always the object of another's actions. Marie adores him and caresses and garlands his head. In general, though, he is treated cruelly by the world. Gerard sees him as a rival for Marie's love, and beats him. But being the object of her passion is not something within Balthazar's power to cause, to stop, or to take responsibility for. Does Gerard imagine that these beatings would cause the animal to cease his affection for her? In this love triangle—Marie's passion, Gerard's jealousy, Balthazar's innocence

BALTHAZAR

—Balthazar suffers in a way that the film shows we are not in a position to understand. We do not know what makes sense to him. We see only that he is beaten. His attempted escapes, his jumping at the sound of exploding firecrackers, and his braying make it clear, however, he is not insensible.

However opaque Balthazar is, the psychology of human action toward him is typically depicted in terms of economics, love, or sadism. That is, Balthazar is shown in a different light according to the requirements of his masters. Often they are characterized in the fashion of medieval allegory as personifications of sins—Pride, Avarice, Gluttony, etc. Characters act in a way that the film regards as realistic: according to fundamental feelings of power, love, shame, desire, avarice, pride, will, etc. People act or avoid acting, the film suggests, because of such qualities.

Balthazar does not have the same meaning to us as he does for the characters. The difference is structured by, and is the structure of, the allegory. On the level of the *story*, Balthazar's status as subject or object, the role of circumstance and accident (what the film designates as "chance"), and the meaning of his suffering, are determined psychologically. On the level of the *representation*, Balthazar's meaning is ecstatic, profound, and religious.

The first function of the allegory is the blocking (perhaps we might say the veiling) of a certain more apparent, literal reading. Structures of contradiction, enigma, and incompleteness work in carefully designed ways to frustrate a fully comprehensible following of the film. We do not know, for example, exactly what the relations are among Arnold, Gerard, the murder, the police, and the smuggling. We are confronted by plain contradictions: Jacques's father says in one shot that he will not have Balthazar, and we see him in the next taking him away. Actions have unexpected consequences, as when Arnold is rewarded by an inheritance immediately after trying to kill the police captain. Explanations, like so many facts, causes, or results, are withheld. The effect is a sense of witnessing events which have (apparently) significant but mysterious causes which we are not privy to. It is a strategy that makes the events we do see (the open combat between Arnold and Gerard, and Arnold's death) full of a



Marie in *AU HASARD BALTHAZAR*

meaning that we are uncertain about how to locate, and whose decipherment implies and requires a background that remains out of reach.

Withholding, veiling, and masking work at several levels of the film: the recital of facts in the story, the depiction of action in planes of the single image, and the general relation between the narrator's conception of character and the vision the spectator has of him. Stylistically, these structures (contradiction, veiling, and partial disclosure) block a certain form of determinate resolution, frustrate our understanding, and make a simple reading of the action obviously inadequate. Arnold's death—foreseen and planned by Gerard, and to which Arnold consents—takes the form of an agreed-upon ritual. The phases of this ritual, the kisses, the ironic salutation, "brother," refer to a compact whose terms are only implicit, though they are specifically not those of the plot. The plot, with its complex ellipses, has a gap at the precise point necessary for us to understand that this killing is justified by some specific betrayal. The ritual form gives such indeterminate events a meaning, by reference to a transcendental order.

The significance of Arnold's death and Gerard's role in it is articulated by the terms of implicit analogy. The film evokes a distant parallelism between its images and events—the road, the donkey saved from death by the man of peace who rides him, the doctrine of friendship—and those of the New Testament. Never does the film imply any precise analogy between Balthazar or Arnold and Christ. Their lives are too different. But the film does show quite explicitly that Balthazar

passes through life periods designated as spiritual stages. Bresson is not speaking of animals, but of the humble of spirit: Balthazar is the explicit vehicle for the personification of the Christian soul. When the story of Balthazar's life comes to be seen as a text that supports an allegorical interpretation (whether or not the story bears an exact analogy by its "stations on the road" to some other perfect life), the meaning of events like Arnold's death, like the larger story of Balthazar, is transformed.

The creation of a figurative sense is assisted by significant musical oppositions. Jazz and rock, played either on Gerard's transistor radio or on the jukebox, define the musical world of the story, and locate that world in a particular historical time, the epoch of cars and motorbikes. The Schubert Sonata Number 20, which is designated as the narrator's musical "voice" by its appearance over the titles, has the connotations of a past age, and stands in opposition to the modernity of the story. It has the effect of a keynote in determining the tone of the film. This introduction includes—it stops to make room for, and to set off—Balthazar's braying. The governing opposition between motorbike and Balthazar establishes an historical link between Balthazar and the sonata, both being old-fashioned, of another age. The sonata's appearance in the body of the film itself, from its first introduction, is closely related to the sweetest and most innocent period of Balthazar's life, his "childhood." As Balthazar-child looks on, Jacques and Marie sit on the swing beneath a huge tree, in the bliss of childhood romance. The Schubert is associated too with the memory of that moment; years later, when Balthazar returns (twice) to the farm and strolls past the bench beneath the tree, the same music reminds us of the ecstatic, lost time. In general, though, the music stands in marked contrast to Balthazar's current, adult suffering. It accompanies moments of anguish, pain, and death. Through its evocation of the past, its association with present suffering encourages us to see another, intensified meaning in the events of the story. Eroticism, cruelty, and death, when juxtaposed with the music (which evokes some higher order of being), take on a mysterious and sublime sense. Like the other mediating structures, the

music works by disjuncture, not analogy, to bring into effect a second sense that contests and sometimes transforms the first.

Likewise, the manner of characterization is linked in a complex way to the differentiation between the levels of literal and figurative meaning. The film asks us to consider the depiction of character in terms of a difference, though not a separation, between surface and depth, outside and inside. While it does not deny a profound sensibility, the manner of acting affirms both that the body is a picture of the soul, and also that the exteriorization or disclosure of that being-in-flesh is less (spiritually) than there is. Bresson's direction of actors is a rejection of the view that a necessary and unambiguous relationship exists between outside and inside. The result makes the depiction of the inner life systematically ambiguous. Even when this (potential) allegorical structure of interpretation is in effect, however, the film invokes special strategies to show that the significance of characters' everyday actions are being psychologically determined: the film maintains the integrity of the literal level.

The form given to the relation between inside and outside shapes our perception of character as subject or object. Because of the way he suffers the action of others with such extraordinary restraint, Arnold (like Balthazar) might be thought to be insensible, beyond or without feeling. But the sound track conveys the sensibility of character through heightening the presence of certain sounds. Taken as representations of sensations, sound has a direct, nearly physical, impact that conveys a form of interiority. Thus the materiality of Balthazar's body, his pain, and his sense of confinement are made fully evident to the spectator-auditor through the clomping of his feet on the pavement, his braying, the constant rattle of chains, the squeak of the closing gate of his stall, and the dull thuds of Gerard's beatings. Even though the film demonstrates that inferences about subjectivity are problematic, the sensations of characters establish a fully credible animate world, remote from the abstraction of an allegorical system.

The "impression of reality" of the film is strengthened by locating action in real settings, whose full materiality and effect on the characters

is evident. Thus the important role of Nature. The village, the abandoned house, the fields of the farm, the place where Gerard and Marie make love, Arnold's shack, the road, natural waterfalls, are all shown as parts of the verdant nature, stirred by the wind, full of blossoming spring, and brilliantly and sensually lit by a palette drawn from the subdued, glowing tones of late afternoon. Long shots which include roads and fields against a background of snowcapped mountains (from which Balthazar descended) depict the characters' place in the larger order of things. Nature, we are reminded, is amply present as a vista, or in the movement of the wind through the trees. In dramatic scenes, though nature is in the background, not fully in focus, its presence is represented impressionistically by a glow or shadow from the reflected light on the trees or by the chirping of birds. Action unfolds in the full scenic volume of nature, and creates an impression of life grounded in the characters' existence in a real world. This "realism" is crucial to the film's authentication of its claims. The religious image of Balthazar's life demands that the depicted world contain and locate characters, chance events, nature, and Balthazar himself. This the film accomplishes by locating its allegorical meaning in the everyday world.

The interpretation of the depicted world is assisted by the ambiguous image of Balthazar's eye. It is remarkable that only twice in the film is an image associated with his glance. The sequence of shot/reverse shots in the garden with Marie suggests that Balthazar returns Marie's look. The most striking instance, though, is the moment in the circus, when (again by a series of shot/reverse shots) Balthazar exchanges glances with a tiger, a monkey, and an elephant. This memorable sequence reveals that Balthazar can look and be looked at, that he does in fact have a "view," but that Balthazar's form of consciousness is irreducible to apprehension by human consciousness. It characterizes a being not restricted to experiencing bodily sensation. But neither does it define—indeed it refuses to suppose it could define—the nature of that irreducible interiority. Balthazar's status as intelligent being and as a witness, though, is linked both to his gaze and to an incapacity to speak a lan-

guage that humans can understand. His braying, which is first given particular significance when it interrupts the Schubert sonata accompanying the credits, has the effect of an absolutely expressive speech whose motivation and meaning is as unintelligible as his gaze. Balthazar has a "voice" whose inarticulateness and distance from music is an expression, nonetheless, of a form of feeling.

In a key scene, however, Marie's seduction, the camera repeatedly shows close-ups of Balthazar blinking impassively as Gerard chases her, and we are tempted to infer, by his passivity, a refusal to intervene. This withholding of a response as in the scene with Arnold discussed above, is the primary strategy for delimiting the spectator's tendency to *personify* Balthazar or to identify with him. He is non-human. The film denies that he is the kind of figure capable of sustaining our wishes: as a character he is as much a screen or barrier as a medium of depiction. It is the function of the allegory to transform this quality into a special sign.

As a sign of his being, Balthazar's eye has a place of importance on the level of representation that transcends any definition he is given by the story: he is given prominence as a witness, presence, and judge. His emblematic place, as an eye in close-up, is distinct from the space of the action. The parallel implied by the comparison to human spiritual trials does not specify his significance exactly, but creates an experience that points toward it. But the film affirms Balthazar's corporality and shows that the meaning attributed to even chance events is believable because its structure was from the start immanent in the everyday.

Where character motivation is obscure, and where the intervention of chance can be read as expressions of a hidden order, the story is the condition for the announcement of a second, superordinate significance. In this way the allegory's organization of literal and figurative sense within the film is rooted in, and has as its model, the process of symbolization in the story of the Christian resurrection. The effect of the allegory is Balthazar's transfiguration from object to mysterious, religious subject.

The depiction of Balthazar's eye transforms a donkey into the subjectivity of one blessed by

grace, a saint. Even when directed toward us, that eye is not embarrassing, but remains enigmatic. Though viewed as a subject, Balthazar is not personified. The incommensurability between us remains. He can not stand as our double or as our brother. The result is that we experience him as Other—to be apprehended only by a figurative representation. Having felt the power, mystery and beauty of this image of a life, we are called on to acknowledge the claims of faith. The film presses us to consider the possibilities of interpretation through a rhetoric that delineates the limits of our knowledge and our vision.

In sum, the rhetorical project of *Au Hasard, Balthazar* is to explicitly locate its story as an “object” in an imaginative space that the narrator and spectator share. The narrator, having decided to regard Balthazar as the central figure, sees his own position-in-the-text as problematical. It is problematical in terms of the intention and design of the entire film, that is, in the relation it establishes between itself and its spectator. The film does not attempt to resolve this problem by flattening the image or calling attention to the procedures of composition as a means of dramatizing the narrator’s productive agency. The film is not in this sense explicitly reflexive. Where the spectator’s conviction in the film’s religious view is made the basis of its claim to truth, the act of narration calls for an authentication of the standing of the one who shows us this world. The film addresses the question of the status of its narrator in two ways.

First, it explicitly depicts the story as an “object” ordered by chance. It shows that the succession of events that constitute the story are guided, apparently, by a logic and rationale beyond the narrator’s control. It exposes the events of the story as lacking a narrative or an artistic necessity by showing that the action results from the separation of cause and effect, the miscarrying of intention, or because the intervention of another order makes human will ineffectual. The tension we sense between the disorder of the story and the lucid line of an allegorical demonstration directs attention to the significance of chance as such as an ordering structure.

The *au hasard* of the title announces and confirms the thematic importance of chance, if read as Bresson’s answer to a question (put by the spectator or by someone speaking for Balthazar) about why the world is as it is. A structure ordered by chance encourages us to see the narrative as an object that exists in its own right, as following an order independent of the characters’ wishes and of the narrator’s power. The narrator, however, does not directly refer to his action of setting forth the narrative in this way. The extraordinary formality of the *representation* (with its elaborate ensemble of parallels, antitheses, comparisons, and reversals that serve to establish the meaning of Balthazar’s relations to the human world) makes that clear. The attending rationale for putting the film before the spectator as an object with this kind of formal structure has to do, I think, with establishing the condition of a believable religious world and determining our relation to it as an aesthetic image.

Second, the narrator locates himself in the film. He represents himself in the text, allegorically, as the eye of Balthazar. No attention is directly drawn to this identification, but Balthazar’s formal position in the text as an eye, and the interpretation that position implies, corresponds to a point of view *on* and *in* the film. It is a non-moralizing lucid view of the facts of existence as seen by the inhuman camera. However lucid its regard, the camera has access to subjectivity only through what it can show, and appearance, the film argues, like physiognomy, is as much a veiling as a disclosure. The allegory thus takes on the function of revealing a hidden truth of interiority behind appearances. The opaqueness of surfaces, the possible occasion of skepticism, is taken by the film as the condition of the demonstration of a religious form of life. The camera makes the narrator’s “reading” of Balthazar’s story, strictly speaking, an exegesis of the Other. The spectacle, however, is not meant to be viewed as an illustration of a moral lesson, but rather to be seen as a redeeming aesthetic image.

The narrator is thus not just “behind” the camera, but represents the function of the camera in the depicted world. Balthazar is not only a character but a subject, distinct from the space

of the story, whose gaze transfigures its meaning. In his identification with Balthazar, the narrator allegorically represents himself as existing in the world of the film and at the same time identifies himself as the one whose point of view makes the meaning of the story. He allegorizes himself as the maker of an interpretation and of a judgment, and locates himself in the only position he could occupy, as a function in the film, in the space of intersubjective communication.

To summarize, the general design of the rhetoric in *Au Hasard, Balthazar* shows itself in the way it determines and locates, as part of its comprehensive effect, the functions of narrator, character, and spectator, in their places-in-the-text. A rhetoric constructed on a figure like Arnold or Balthazar that acts not as a medium or relay, but as an opaque though sensible "center," is necessarily an inquiry into a mode of narration. In such a text, the relation of surrogation or ascription that usually holds between narrator and character is reformulated, and the place of the spectator re-founded. The spectator is given a new role specifically linked to the special project of the narration. The narrator's proper function of depicting a character's experience and conveying it to an audience remains, but it is realized under different conditions with different effects. The reconstruction of the formal rhetoric, specifically of shot/reverse shot and the general strategy of dissociation, frees the spectator from too close an identification with the views of the characters surrounding Balthazar, and puts us in a position to be inscribed within, and to appreciate, the narrator's distanced and allegorical point of view. In this way the film justifies the means it adopts of presenting Balthazar's meaning in the film. It allows us to see the film as an aesthetic image.

Though organizing the difference between *story* and *representation* by means of allegorical interpretation, the film makes explicit the *conditions* for the production of meaning in any text: it invests the narrator with that power of signification. The film restructures the relations among the basic mediating functions, and in doing so, proceeds to a systematic re-examination of the premises and means of narration in a film like *Stage-*

coach in which the function of the narrator is masked and invested in the character. The narrator in this film depicts characters' views but also, as part of its exhibition of the story, explicitly locates and determines the authority for and the significance of those filmic images within the overall design of the film, by representing a figurative position, the "narrator's point of view," by which they are disclosed.

The narrator, in authenticating a religiously defined "impression of the real" by giving a picture of the depth of the story, undertakes to make clear the nature of his own powers and of his relation to the spectator. The film as a whole suggests that reflection on his constitutive powers, and on his authority to speak in an authentically religious mode, brings him to acknowledge, as he confronts the meaning of the Other, the limits of his textual function. The film's form is based on disjunct views. The "narrator's point of view," then, is a product of a distinct effort to avoid misrepresenting the knowledge he has of this special character and to record the effect of this reserve in the style. The spectator, faced by this declaration and by a filmic rhetoric designed to dissociate shots from inferences about characters' views and from narrative point of view, is in a reflective position to appreciate what he is to do. As a scene of instruction, the film demonstrates that the art of viewing, and in particular the role of emotional projection in "reading," needs to be reformulated and reintegrated: within this mode of narration *Au Hasard, Balthazar* calls for our attention. The film seems to propose the redemption of the world by a passionate but distanced contemplation of an aesthetic image. That we do not, finally, recognize Balthazar as what we think we are, should not, the film implies, stop us from embracing him just the same.

This essay is indebted to Jean-Pierre Oudart's writings on Bresson in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, especially "La Suture," (nos. 211-212) and to Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed* for his description of the ontological position of the filmic spectator as well as the concept of "acknowledgment."